

FOOD FOR A FAST-DAY

6544
OR, A FEW

SEASONABLE HINTS

FOR THE USE OF

THOSE GOOD PEOPLE

WHO BELIEVE IN THE PROPRIETY AND EFFICACY OF

PUBLIC FASTS,

AND WHO INTEND TO OBSERVE

The 25th of Feb. 1795, being the Day appointed by
ROYAL PROCLAMATION,

For a general Fast, throughout the kingdom of England, the dominion
of Wales, and the Town of Berwick upon Tweed.

K
BY WILLIAM RICHARDS, M. A.

MEMBER OF THE PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY.

Ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness.

—Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of
wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed
go free, and that ye break every yoke? &c. ISAIAH lviii.

Appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father who is in secret.

Love your enemies.

MATT. vi. 18. and v. 44.

Bless and curse not.

ROM. xii. 14.

We ought to obey God rather than men.

ACTS v. 29.

L R N N:

PRINTED and SOLD by W. TURNER;

Sold also by J. S. JORDAN, Fleet-street, London; P. GEDGE, Bury;

B. FLOWER, Cambridge; J. MARCH, Norwich;

And may be had of all the Booksellers.

PRICE THREE PENCE.

Part of the *Fifty Eighth* Chapter of *Isaiab.*

(BISHOP LOUTH'S TRANSLATION.)

- 3 WHEREFORE have we fasted, and thou seest not ?
Have we afflicted our souls, and thou dost not regard ?
Behold in the day of your fasting, ye enjoy your pleasure ;
And all your demands of labour ye rigorously exact.
- 4 Behold, ye fast for strife and contention ;
And to smite with the fist the poor.
Wherefore fast ye unto me in this manner ;
To make your voice to be heard on high ?
- 5 Is such then the fast which I choose ;
That a man should afflict his soul for a day ?
Is it, that he should bow down his head like a bulrush ;
And spread sackcloth and ashes for his couch ?
Shall this be called a fast,
And a day acceptable to JEHOVAH ?
- 6 Is not this the fast, which I choose
To dissolve the bands of wickedness ?
To loosen the oppressive burthens ;
To deliver those that are crushed by violence ;
And that ye should break asunder every yoke ?
- 7 Is it not, to distribute thy bread to the hungry ;
And to bring the wandering poor into thy house ?
When thou seest the naked, that thou clothe him ;
And that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh ?
- 8 Then shall thy light break forth like the morning ;
And thy wounds shall speedily be healed over :
And thy righteousness shall go before thee ;
And the glory of JEHOVAH shall bring up thy rear.
- 9 Then shalt thou call, and JEHOVAH shall answer ;
Thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Lo I am here !



Just published, price 1s.

(the second Edition with Additions)

Reflections on French Atheism and on English Christianity.

By WILLIAM RICHARDS.

Lynn : Printed and sold by W. Turner ; sold also by J. S. Jordan, Fleet-
street, London ; J. March, Norwich ; B. Flower, Cambridge ; P. Gedge,
Bury ; and may be had of all other Booksellers.

FOOD FOR A FAST-DAY, &c.

RELIGIOUS Fasts are countenanced in the New Testament. Jesus Christ declared that his disciples would fast when he should be taken away from them :* and we read that they actually did so.† Their fasting, however, does not appear to have been of a *public* nature. Public Fasts would not have accorded with their Divine Master's express rule, Matt. vi. 16, &c. "When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance : for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face : that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy father who is in secret, &c."—Neither were those fasts *national* fasts ; for there was not in the world then, any more than now, a nation of christians, or of sincere disciples and followers of Jesus Christ.—Nor yet, were they fasts observed in consequence, or by virtue of imperial, royal, or public *proclamation* ; for the primitive christians did not conceive that religion appertained to the province of the civil magistrate, or, that the edicts and mandates of earthly courts could have any degree of weight or force, when they went to dictate or prescribe to them,

A 2

in

* Mark ii. 20. Luke v. 35. † Acts xiii. 2, 3, and xiv. 23.
1 Cor. vii. 5.

in what related to divine worship, or the direction of their religious observances. The truth is, they absolutely and uniformly refused all compliance with human authority in matters of religion : and this was, in fact, the main cause of the severe persecutions and sufferings which they underwent. Their religious fasts were never preceded, or accompanied by public proclamations : for that would have favoured too much of hypocritical parade, superstitious pomp and ostentation, to accord with the self-denying precepts, the unaffected simplicity, and genuine spirit of the gospel. To proclaim a fast, would have been, in their estimation, like blowing a trumpet to call all the world to witness and admire how very pious and devout they were—than which nothing could have been further from their inclinations, or more repugnant to their principles. Such a plan may well agree with the religion of antichrist, but it is quite impossible to reconcile it with the religion of the Apostles and primitive christians. “ Come and see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts,” is under the New Testament, as it was under the Old, the language of a hypocrite, and not of a good man.—Religious Societies, as well as civil magistrates, have often been too fond of publishing to the world, before hand, the fasts and other devotional exercises they were about to engage in. Of a very dissimilar complexion, and, doubtless, the offspring of quite another kind of spirit were the fasts observed by the primitive christians.—They were, in all probability, the private acts of devout individuals, and, sometimes of whole societies, whose religious exercises, and especially those of that kind, from the very state and nature of primitive christianity, could not be subject to public observation. When christians fast, their Divine Master forbids their acting ostentatiously, or appearing unto men to fast,

as that is the characteristic of hypocrites; but he enjoins them to perform that service privately, or, so as not to appear unto men to fast: and he positively assures them, that their Father who seeth in secret will reward them openly. Who will undertake to reconcile with this rule the modern political practice, or fashionable mode of fasting; or to make it appear, that Jesus Christ ever allowed his disciples to fast for blood, or for the purpose of cursing their enemies; and praying that God would confound their devices and destroy them?—Surely, it may be affirmed without rashness or presumption, that to such kinds of fasts the **NEW TESTAMENT** no where affords any manner of sanction or countenance.

In the **OLD TESTAMENT**, the instances of religious fasts are pretty numerous: but the Old Testament is not a rule to christians in this case. The instances however, which occur in that book are, in great part, if not mostly of the hypocritical and diabolical kind, and therefore it will hardly be pretended that they are recorded for our example or imitation.

If we attend to the period subsequent to the Babylonish captivity, we shall not be able to meet with such proofs of the general prevalence of real virtue and true religion as will warrant a conclusion, that the fasts and other religious observances of that time were, for the most part, such as met the approbation of the Deity. The representation which Haggai and Malachi give of the prevailing spirit of their times, is evidently unfavourable to such a sentiment.—In Zechariah's time, a visible disinclination for the service of God too generally appeared. The people were ready to say, with those of Malachi's time, "Behold what a weariness is it?" They called out to the priests and prophets, saying, "Should I weep in the fifth month as I have done

these so many years?" From men who had been so long used to fast in a formal and hypocritical manner, till they had grown quite weary of it, such language cannot be deemed either strange or unnatural. It was as much as to say, Must we still keep up our long-accustomed fasts? or, Are these humiliating and wearisome exercises never to cease? In Isaiah's time a somewhat similar spirit seems to have been prevalent—(lviii. 3.) "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seekest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our souls and thou takest no knowledge?" God condescends to answer both the inquiries. To *Isaiah's* querists he replies—"Behold in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact all your labours—Ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness, &c." And to those whom *Zechariah* mentions, He says, "Did you at all fast unto me, even unto me?"*

As

* Chap. vii. 5.—When God sends the Prophet with this answer or message, he bids him *speake to ALL THE PEOPLE of the land, and to the PRIESTS*: which seems evidently to imply, that the charge of not having fasted unto God, or of having fasted hypocritically, applied to the whole nation, not excepting the very *priests* themselves. But why should that order be so particularly pointed out? Doubtless, because of their universal defection, and rooted antipathy to the pure worship of God, as well as their having too generally borne the same character in former days.—It is very remarkable, and equally true, that in degenerate times, priests have always been among the foremost to corrupt the divine service and to support that corruption; and, of course, to oppose every salutary and effectual reform. Not only the numerous priests of Baal, and of the Groves, are instances of this, but the same also may be said even of those of the Temple in the days of Jeremiah, and of Ezekiel, as well as of Zechariah: not to mention other periods of the Old Testament history.—The same is known also to have been the case in the times of our Lord and his Apostles: the opposition to whose doctrine and cause, and the violent and bloody persecutions raised against them, were chiefly excited and directed by the unprincipled, bigoted and intolerant priests

As much as to say, you have not at all fasted unto me : that is, you have not, in the least, served, or pleased, or glorified me by your fasts.—As there is the appearance of a similar spirit now existing and abounding in this country, a reply very much of the same sort, in all probability, would be given to British querists, were the Deity now to condescend, after his ancient manner, to indulge them with a reply.

If we turn our attention to the time of the Babylonish captivity, we can discover, in general, but the bare form of godliness, without its spirit and power.—That the Fasts held during that period were, generally, formal and hypocritical observances, may be inferred from those memorable words of God by Zechariah (vii. 5, 6.) which have been, in part, already quoted—“ When ye fasted and mourned, in the fifth and seventh months

A 4

(said

priests of those days.—Under the Papacy too, it is well known what enemies priests were to the cross of Christ, and what oceans of innocent blood have been shed by their instigation.—Nay, even in our own country, and that since it has borne the name of *Protestant*, myriads of honest and pious men have suffered most severely, from the relentless opposition, and infernal intrigues of a persecuting and blood-thirsty priesthood. Would to God it might be truly said, that we have amongst us at this present time none of that order who wish to see the severities of former days revived, and unsparingly exercised upon their nonconforming neighbours.—Appearances, it must be owned, have been thought, for sometime, pretty strongly to indicate, that the bitterly and violently intolerant among the Clergy are neither few nor feeble.—Others, however, among them are, certainly, of a very different description : and these ought to be sincerely and highly respected. Their mild and benevolent spirit must, indeed, be imputed to the influence of foreign principles, and not to any thing that properly appertains to their hierarchy, which is well known to have been always incurably intolerant and oppressive. In short, these worthy men appear to have so far learned Christ as to imbibe a good degree or portion of his meek and benign spirit, in spite of the contrary tendency of the hierarchy or establishment to which they belong.

(said Jehovah) even those *seventy years*, did ye at all fast unto me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?" So, it seems, that whatever they did in religion, whether *fasting* or *feasting*, it was all one and the same thing to them—a mere selfish, sensual, formal, and hypocritical business. Are our annual Fasts, or annual Feasts (Christmas for instance) any thing better?

When God says "even those seventy years," he plainly points out their shocking depravity and impenitency, in the mean time; which even their long and severe captivity had not eradicated or removed. And can we say that our national depravity and impenitency are less than theirs? or, that our national disasters (during the American and present war) have produced any salutary effects upon our national character, in making us more thoughtful, just, or virtuous? If not, can there be any likelihood, or probability, that the ensuing Fast will be observed in a better manner than our former ones, or be conducive of more advantage?—Rather, is it not too probable that it will be indeed a new crime, and a new curse, in addition to that long and dismal catalogue which already threatens us with certain and swift destruction.

The fore-mentioned question, "Did you at all fast unto me, *EVEN those seventy years?*" seems also to imply, that previously as well as subsequently to that period, that was, if possible, still less the case: As if he had said, Did you fast unto me, even during your captivity; (that trying season, so well adapted to lead to serious reflection and repentance :) much less at other times; that is *before* and *since* that period?—Upon the whole, it seems to appear from hence, that national Fasts were of old, almost always, shockingly abused,
and

and scarce ever observed in a manner acceptable to God or profitable to mankind. And are the times mended since? Or, is the general thirst for blood and vengeance, so visible now in this country, any indication, that the observance of the approaching Fast will be either pleasing to the Deity, or truly beneficial to the nation? If the jews fasted hypocritically during the trying season, and under the severe circumstances of their captivity, is it less likely, that we should do so at this season, and under our present circumstances? Nay, is it not exceedingly probable, if not quite certain, that we shall now, once more, incur the charge and guilt of religious hypocrisy, and solemn mockery? If so, our approaching national solemnity presents to our view but a very gloomy and melancholly prospect.

Destitute of inward piety, or the religion of the heart, as the bulk of the jews evidently were during those *seventy years*, they nevertheless seem to have abounded in the trappings and ~~the~~ religion. They fasted in the *fifth* and *seventh* months: that is, twice, at least, every year: which in seventy years amounted to 140 national Fasts. Yet at none of all those times had they fasted *unto God*, or after a Godly sort: that is, in a truly sincere and acceptable manner.*

The Fasts held *before the captivity* were likewise, it should seem, in general, of the same description. They were evidently so in *Jeremiah's* time, (see ch. xiv, and xxxvi.) as well as that of *Isaiah*. The latter is very particular and, express in describing, as such, those which were observed in his day: (ch. lviii.) By his account,

* And is there not too much reason to fear that the same will apply to our own national fasts, during the American and the present war at least? The Deity, certainly, cannot be said to have heard our prayers, or granted the petitions we have preferred to him at those times: and does not that seem to indicate that we are in the wrong, and that he disapproves our conduct?

count, though the worshippers used, at such times, to afflict their souls for a day, bow down their heads as a bulrush, and spread sackcloth and ashes under them, (which, by the bye, was much more than is usually done, at such seasons, by christian nations) yet they relinquished none of their pleasures and luxuries; nor did they abandon or forsake any of their criminal and oppressive practices; but took special care to retain, to the full, the cruel servitude of the *poor*, and to exact all their labours.—They were, in fact, men of much the same temper and cast with our modern advocates for the *slave trade*, and the execrable european war-system. In short, their Fasts were “for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness, &c.” It can, therefore, be no wonder, that they should prove a curse, instead of a blessing to them.—Let modern nations beware that their fasts come not under the same description.—It is certain that no fasts can be of any real avail now, any more than in Isaiah’s time, if men be not inclined to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke: to deal their bread to the hungry, to afford shelter to the houseless, and competent covering to the naked. This is the very line of conduct, and these the very actions, of which the Deity expressly said of old, “Is not this the *fast* which I have chosen?”—How can Britons expect to reap real or substantial benefit from public fasts, or any other religious formalities, while they appear to delight so much in war—While the system of Oriental pillage is not abandoned—While the African Slave commerce is encouraged—While the poor hapless negroes, in the West Indies, are retained in rigorous and cruel bondage, without the most distant hope of deliverance or emancipation—and While our own starving poor are daily multiplying at a most

a most alarming rate, and that, without our adopting or contriving any effectual measure for their relief, or applying any sure remedy for their grievous and growing sufferings ?

In treating of the public Fasts under the Old Testament, one cannot well omit or overlook that ever memorable and solemn Fast observed in the reign of the renowned king AHAB, and recorded in the twenty first chapter of the first book of kings : especially, as the potentates and statesmen of modern Europe, otherwise called *Christendom*, seem for the most part, to have taken that as their model on similar occasions.—Never, perhaps, were public Fasts carried to a higher pitch of courtly refinement, or to a greater degree of political perfection, than in the reign of this same king Ahab, and under the direction of his intriguing, artful, and enterprising queen JEZEBEL. The story briefly, and in substance, is as follows,—King Ahab, at a certain time, took a great liking to the estate or inheritance of one of his neighbours, and conceived a very strong and violent desire to obtain possession of the same : a case by no means uncommon among modern, and even christian princes. The name of the person whose patrimony king Ahab so violently coveted was NABOTH ; who, not happening to be at all disposed to part with it, flatly, and rather unceremoniously rejected the king's proposal ; although expressed in a style far more moderate and conciliating than has been generally used among princes. At this unexpected and mortifying refusal, his majesty was so very terribly chagrined, that he actually fell ill, took to his bed, and seemed to have formed the resolution of starving himself to death. So unaccustomed was he to have his royal will thus resisted, and so unable to bear any contradiction or opposition from his subjects, that his presence of mind and fortitude

tude entirely forsook him on this occasion, and he appeared quite confounded, and totally at a loss what course to pursue. The sagacious and beloved partner of his throne, however, was not so easily cast down or disconcerted. No sooner was she made acquainted with her royal consort's disappointment and vexation, than she took up the matter in good earnest, and soon hit upon an expedient which could not fail of restoring to his majesty his former health and cheerfulness; and, withal, of procuring him the quiet and cheap possession of the inheritance of Naboth.—Having deliberately formed her plan, the queen, forthwith, sent letters to certain placemen, or retainers of the Court, all of the right Reevesian stamp; an order of men always devoted to the pleasure and interest of their superiors, and ready at the shortest notice to do all their dirty work. These, moreover, dwelt in Jezreel, where Naboth resided, and so were the more proper to be employed on this occasion. They were, in fact, what might be called, The Mayor, Recorder, and Aldermen of the place, or, perhaps with still greater propriety, the members of the high Court of Justiciary for that part of the kingdom. The queen's letters were written in the king's name, and contained a royal proclamation for a *public fast*: the pretence for which seemed to be, that both the *Church* and *Monarchy* were in *danger*; and the Deity, it is probable, was to be solemnly invoked to preserve both. On that solemn and memorable day, a numerous high church mob, or, in other words, a great multitude of the friends of Church and King being collected, poor Naboth was to be apprehended and brought to his trial, under a charge of high treason, of the most aggravated description, or, as the sacred historian expresses it, of having blasphemed God and the King. The minds of the people hav-

ing

ing been sufficiently alarmed and inflamed, by those vile, thorough-paced court-agents, and two sons of Belial, or false witnesses being suborned, poor Naboth was easily found guilty of blasphemy against God and the King, or, of being an enemy to Church and State, (a downright atheist, republican, and leveller, no doubt) and immediately stoned to death. Tydings of this tragical, but pleasing event, were immediately dispatched to the queen: "And it came to pass, (says the sacred historian) when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead." He, accordingly, went, and took possession: but it proved in the end, both to him and his queen, and even to all his family, a most fatal acquisition. And it remains upon record, as a most instructive and awful lesson to all ambitious and rapacious rulers. It proves also, the very high antiquity of political and hypocritical facts, and that it is, by no means, a new or strange thing, for courtiers and statesmen to convert some of the most solemn parts of religion into court-craft and state-tricks, in order the more effectually to blind the people, and give an unsuspecting, and even a sanctimonious appearance to the most unjustifiable and atrocious proceedings. We need look no further than RUSSIA, for proofs and examples of Jezebel's policy being still held in no mean estimation, and even, of its being closely adhered to, and strictly observed in the most extensive empire upon earth. Would to God, no indications of a similar policy were discoverable nearer home.—Her sacred and excellent majesty, our great and good ally, the empress of all the Russias, (the supreme head of the Muscovite, if not of the whole Greek church) closed her late successful,

cessful, but *unjust* and *bloody* war against the Turks by the appointment and observance of a day of solemn thanksgiving to God, for the signal victories with which he had vouchsafed to crown her imperial arms.—One of those victories was obtained at *Ismael*, on the 22d. of Dec. 1790, under the conduct of her renowned and favourite general *Suwarrow*. The place was taken by storm; and the garrison, whose bravery merited (and would have received from the atheistical French) the most favourable and honourable terms, were *massacred* IN COLD BLOOD, to the amount of upwards of 30,000 men; and the place was given up to the unrestrained fury of the Russian soldiery. The most horrid outrages were perpetrated on the innocent and defenceless inhabitants, and the conduct of the *christian* conquerors was more that of a horde of cannibals than of a civilized people.—Was not this a very proper occasion for chaunting *Te Deum*, and observing a day of solemn thanksgiving to God?—This same *Suwarrow* the *christian* general of a *christian* empress, now commands in Poland, and has actually destroyed 30,500 of that unoffending people (3,000 of whom were defenceless *women and children*,) in the space of twenty two days. The shocking massacre of *Warsaw* will stamp eternal infamy on his detestable name, and on that of his execrable employer. *Praga*, a populous suburb of that city was taken by storm; 5,000 Poles fell in the assault: about nine o'clock at night, and ten hours after all resistance had ceased, the victors set fire to the town, and began to butcher the inhabitants. The sick and wounded perished in the flames; the rest, old men, women and children, fell by the sword. Nine thousand (some say 11,000) persons, of every age, and of either sex, are computed to have fallen in this horrid massacre.—Was not this, likewise, a very proper occasion for the victors

to

to congratulate themselves on their success, and to observe a day of solemn thanksgiving to God, and to sing *Te Deum* to him for the same?—Be that as it may, it appears that they actually did so. On the arrival of the bloody news at *Petersburg*, a day of solemn thanksgiving to God was appointed, when *Te Deum* was joyfully chaunted, and the Deity confidently and devoutly invoked to continue to grant to her imperial majesty similar tokens of his favour!—Shortly after this abominable scene was closed, the northern Jezebel received the congratulations of the German emperor, and the king of Prussia; both of whom appeared to be in raptures with the tidings of her glorious achievements at Warsaw and other parts of Poland:—a clear proof that their souls are in perfect unison with hers, in every thing that is base, vile, and diabolical. If Britons are capable of blushing at their absurd and foolish partiality for their allies, in preference to the atheistical and democratical French, this will furnish them with a fair opportunity so to do: for the king of Prussia, and the emperor of Germany, as well as the empress of Russia, are of the number of our great and good allies, and even the very chief of them.

The wars of modern Europe are, for the most part, much like the fighting matches of our English Pugilists: only they are on a larger scale; and being so, they ought to be held in greater detestation, as their pernicious effects must be far more extensive and dreadful. Their very principle too is evidently more vile and detestable. What renders them still more hateful is the trick of connecting religion with them, by the observance of fast days, &c. which is attempting to unite what God had put asunder: for it may be very truly said, that where war begins, religion (the christian at least) ends.—Had Mendoza, and Johnson, and Big Ben

Ben and the rest of that order taken into their heads to introduce fast days or thanksgiving days, as appendages to their barbarous and brutal profession, all serious and virtuous men would have viewed the measure with horror. But it is, certainly, no less horrible and abominable in the other case, hard as it may be to convince most men of it.

Religion has been too often sadly degraded, and rendered subservient to the unworthiest and vilest of purposes. With courtiers it is seldom any thing else but a piece of political machinery to promote their own perverse and crooked designs, of which the prayers drawn up in time of war by public authority, are sufficient proofs. In these the people are taught to call their enemies atheists, apostates, men of reprobate minds, and other bad names, and to wish for their destruction: (a most christian conduct, no doubt!) And that too, in the very moments of the deepest self-abasement, or when they are supposed to have humbled themselves before God, in order to obtain pardon of their sins, and to avert the heavy judgments which their manifold provocations have most justly deserved! Nay, and even at a time when they are professing christian charity, and talking of humbly interceding with God for those very enemies! Is not this something like fulfilling that scripture which saith, "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing?" Let us not forget that it immediately follows, "These things ought not to be so.—Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?"

May the Supreme Ruler of the universe restore to us and to all nations the inestimable blessing of PEACE: and may he hasten the long promised period when mankind shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning hooks; and when they shall learn war no more.